



Notes from

HORNBAKER GARDENS

"The Princeton Perennial People"

22937 1140 N. Ave., Princeton, Illinois 61356

NEWSLETTER No. 10

(815) 659-3282

MARCH 1999

Retail Hours

Starting April 12, we will be open seven days a week, Monday through Saturday 8:00 to 5:00 and Sunday 12:00 to 5:00.

We will be closed July 4 and Labor Day, September 6, 1999.

OPEN HOUSE AND HOSTA WALK: We will hold our twelfth annual Open House and Hosta Walk on June 11, 12, and 13, when the hostas are looking their best. Refreshments will be served, and drawings for prizes will be held each day.

PEAK BLOOM SEASONS: Just a reminder that the peak of iris bloom is usually the last two weeks of May. Daylilies have an extended bloom season, but the peak season for us seems to be the last three weeks of July. Our "Fall Flower Days" will be the weekends of September 12-13 and 19-20, when the color and selection in our field of mums should be best. We generally have a list of plants and products at special prices at that time.

SPRING WORKSHOPS

Dividing Perennials: We will again hold our free workshop on dividing perennials on Saturday, April 24, at 10:00 a.m. We will discuss and demonstrate when and how to dig, divide and replant various perennials, including hostas and daylilies. The workshop is designed to show gardeners that most perennials are hardy and easily divided, and help them overcome their fear of hurting the plant in the process. No reservations are required.

Pond Workshop: This workshop will be held on Saturday, May 1, at 10:00
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Hooked on Ponds

Despite the rising popularity of "backyard ponds," we had shied away from ponds and water gardening. Perhaps our reluctance to get involved in this fascinating area of gardening has been due to being overwhelmed by all the confusing and contradictory information that is out there. It just seemed that there were so many decisions to be made. What's the best kind of liner? What kind and size of pump is needed to make a decent waterfall or stream? Is some sort of filter system needed to keep the water clear? How deep should the pond be and how should it be shaped?

This was just the start of our questions, and the answers always varied depending upon to whom you were talking or

which article you were reading.

The other thing that held us back was that we hadn't exactly been blown away by most of the small ponds we had seen. Pond owners always seem to be very enthusiastic about their ponds, but somehow the look of exposed black plastic, a pump sitting in the bottom of the pond with a black tube running from it, a filtering system gurgling away next to the pond, and plants growing in pots partially submerged in water just wasn't our idea of what a natural looking pond should be.

We had a feeling that the water gardening trend would die out because of our mistaken notion that ponds were a lot of
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IS THIS YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER?

Our mailing list has simply grown too large and expensive to deal with. We are going to start again from scratch. If you wish to remain on the mailing list, please drop us a note in the mail, or sign up again this spring when you are here. We thank you for your understanding.

Hardy Ornamental Grasses For This Area

Each year, we at the nursery become more excited about, and appreciative of, the ornamental grasses. Clumps that were planted two or three years ago are reaching an impressive state of maturity. Some that were planted five years ago are just plain awesome. It is gratifying to see the rising popularity of grasses here in the Midwest, where grasses covered the plains just 150 years ago.

Some of the most dramatic varieties are in the *Miscanthus* family. In recent testing at the University of Minnesota, the two varieties of *Miscanthus* shown to be most hardy are two of our favorites. *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silver Feather' (generally listed as 'Silberfeder') forms a majestic, vase-shaped clump of gracefully arching foliage five to six feet tall. The silvery and silky plumes are held two to three feet above the foliage, emerging in September and making a fine show well into winter.

The other most hardy variety was *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Purpurascens', also known as Flame Grass. The foliage on 'Purpurascens' grows to about four feet. The showy plumes develop in late summer and are silvery as they emerge, then thicken and turn beige. The grass begins to change to a red-orange color in September, and eventually to a burnt reddish brown in late fall. If you can possibly plant this grass in a location where it will be backlit by the setting sun, you will be well rewarded.

Panicum virgatum (Switch Grass) is a very versatile grass that has proven to be hardy here at our nursery. It is valued as an ornamental for its erect upright form, showy flowers, brilliant fall color, and interesting winter silhouette. The foliage stands nearly three feet tall, and the airy panicles are held a foot higher, generally starting to plume out in August. The plumes make excellent fillers in flower bouquets or in bouquets using several different grasses.

Two cultivars of *Panicum* are worth mentioning. 'Heavy Metal' is noted for its powdery blue foliage, which turns yellow in the fall. 'Rotstrahlbusch' is considered to have the best red fall color.

Plant most grasses in full sun in a soil enriched with organic matter. Provide adequate moisture until the grass is well

established. A mulch will help by holding in moisture. Many grasses grow well in very moist locations, such as next to a pond. In the spring, cut the old foliage back to a few inches and enjoy watching the new shoots emerge. Don't be impatient. Many grasses don't get going until the ground is well warmed.

Most of the grasses provide winter interest outside, but you can create some fantastic grass bouquets to enjoy inside. Grasses make perfect bouquets to show off large urns, crocks, antique milk cans, and other large containers that are generally too large for most flowers. Simply cut the grasses at their peak and place them in the containers. Both mixed bouquets and all-of-one-kind bouquets can be striking.

Perennial Plant of the Year

The Perennial Plant of the Year for 1999, chosen by the Perennial Plant Association, is *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm', better known as Black Eyed Susans. 'Goldsturm' is a long-blooming plant that can be relied on to provide a showy splash of color from July through September. It grows around two feet tall and nearly as wide, with dark green foliage and numerous bright gold daisies with black cone centers.

Most of you are already familiar with

this plant because it is so easy to grow and blooms for such a long time. It grows best in full sun to light shade in moist, but well drained, soil enriched with organic matter. Spring division is easy, if you want more plants. In fact, it should be divided every few years.



We like to plant 'Goldsturm' with a couple of other plants that bloom in late summer, *Echinacea purpurea* (Purple Coneflower) and *Perovskia* (Russian Sage), both of which were previously named as Perennial Plants of the Year. 'Goldsturm' also looks great in mass plantings or mixed in with plantings of ornamental grasses.

Kris Hahne Starts Landscaping Business

Kris Hahne, who has done landscaping services for us for the last three years, has started her own gardening business, known as Kris' Gardens, operating from her rural Putnam address. We wish Kris the best in her new venture, and recommend her highly to any of you who need gardening services. We will no longer be providing landscaping services.

Pet news

We are very sad to report that coyotes killed all three of our geese this winter. They came right down near the house to get them. Mama Goose had been with us for 16 years and was a special pet. An inside job is suspected. Our dog, Rif, claims he slept through the whole thing. That's his story, and he's sticking to it.

No foul play is suspected in the equally sad death of our beloved gray cat, Lady Di, who died of old age in November. She came to us on a jet from Kathy's brother in California 15 years ago, and was the one cat that was allowed in the house. We miss her.

Java, our chocolate colored cat, had a small litter late in the summer. None of the kittens are brown. These three mouseketeers are known as Pedro, his brother Daryl, and his other brother Daryl.

The lovable but mischievous raccoon, Berniece, has moved to the woods, where she belongs. She surfaced on several occasions over the winter, coming onto the porch at night to eat as much cat food and dog food as she could find. Rif and the cats were cordial to her. They meekly, but wisely, allowed her to finish off their bowls, waited for her to leave, and then asked for refills. With her winter fur all fluffy, she looked the size of a Volkswagen Beetle. We don't expect to see her come back now that it has started warming up.

Ponds

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work, and that once pond owners discovered how much work they were, and got tired of fighting green water and dying fish, they would soon be filling in the holes in the ground and planting more perennials.

Fortunately, we did not quit looking for a pond system. We love our own earth-bottomed ponds so much that there just had to be a good system out there that would work and be aesthetically pleasing. We found it. Rich, along with Mike Saylor, a young man who has worked for us for several years, attended a seminar this winter where they learned about a system for installing ponds that was developed by Greg Wittstock, who has been installing ponds for a living for fifteen years. When he started, fifteen years ago, he had all the kinds of questions that we have been wrestling with. What he soon discovered was that most of the "information" existing at that time was just plain wrong. (For starters, books on ponds at that time advised pouring concrete to hold the water. Naturally, the concrete cracked.)

After many trials and errors, Wittstock devised his own method and materials to use in his pond installation business. He has continually improved the materials as time has gone by and as technology has advanced. Now, besides installing ponds, his business, Aquascape Designs, sells pond kits and components to businesses like ours to use in installing ponds for homeowners or to sell to the homeowner who wants to do it himself.

We are absolutely sold on both the method and the materials. The pond is installed with an EPDM flexible liner. A pump in a skimmer/filter recycles water to a biofalls/filter, from which it spills out directly into the pond or into a stream/waterfall that leads back to the pond. The liner and upper portions of the filters are entirely covered with rock and gravel so that no plastic is left exposed. The pump and plumbing are completely hidden. A shelf is provided a few inches below, and completely surrounding the pond on which marginal plants can be planted directly in a bed of gravel. Plant pockets in the bottom of the pond provide places to plant water lilies. Fish complete a naturally balanced ecosystem that is easy to maintain. The result is a natural looking pond that will

provide the owner hours of pleasure, from water gardening itself, and from the relaxation and peacefulness that water naturally provides.

We have already installed a demonstration pond measuring 11'x16' next to our retail area, and we can hardly wait to get some plants and fish into it. Rich and Mike both have a bad case of pond fever. It's very similar to the well known hosta bug.

Mike already has a crew of workers lined up to help him install a pond at your home. Please give us a call if you would like for Mike to come to your home to consult with you in order to help you decide on a good location, size, and design for your water feature. Our charge for this service will be \$50.00 if you live within 30 miles of our nursery, and \$75.00 if you live between 30 and 75 miles away. However, this charge will be subtracted from the purchase price if you purchase a pond kit, whether we install it or you install it yourself. As a result of this consultation charge, those who purchase do not end up paying extra for those who do not.

We also will be having a pond workshop this spring to explain the Aquascape Designs pond system. This workshop will be helpful to anyone thinking about a water feature, whether you plan to install it yourself, or have it installed. See the article on workshops elsewhere in this newsletter.

A few tips for those of you who are considering a water feature:

1. Choose a flat area up close to the house, next to a patio or porch if pos-

sible. That way you can enjoy the pond to the fullest. Feed and watch the fish as you enjoy a cup of coffee first thing in the morning, or a tall iced tea at the end of the day.

2. Build it big enough, for two reasons. First, a larger pond is easier to maintain because a larger pond creates its own balanced ecosystem more easily than a smaller pond. Second, water gardening is addictive. A small pond will soon be too small to accommodate all of the plants that you want to try out. A pond that is 11'x16' is a nice size for many yards.
3. Plan on putting both plants and fish in the pond. A balanced ecosystem results in cleaner, clearer water, allowing you to better enjoy both the plants and the fish.

Although we are new to the water feature business, we are not new to ponds. We have been enjoying our one-acre pond for many years. It is planted with water lilies and marginal plants and stocked with fish. It is a year-round source of serenity. Sitting by the water takes us to a whole other world, a world that is full of life, but a world that is slower moving, simpler and calmer.

The great thing about gardening is that gardeners are always willing to share their knowledge and experience with each other, so that we all can become better gardeners. We look forward to visiting with those of you who already have ponds as well as with those of you who are considering getting into it. We'll all learn more together.

Workshops

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a.m. Learn why the Aquascape Designs system is the best on the market. We'll show you the different components that go into the water feature, and go through the 20 step method of installing it.

Whether you are thinking about installing your pond yourself, or simply want to learn more about this particular system before deciding to have one installed, this workshop is for you. Rich will conduct the workshop, which should last around an hour and a half. Rich and Mike will both be on hand afterward to

answer any individual questions you might have. Advance registration is required, and the cost is \$25.00. We suggest that you either mail in your check right away or call and use your credit card to register. Should you purchase a complete pond kit or have us install a pond this season, the workshop fee will be deducted from the purchase price. If we get an unwieldy number of registrants, we will schedule another pond workshop for the following Saturday.

What's New At Hornbaker Gardens

Pond plants, that's what. We are still in the process of ordering in more water plants, so we don't have the final list available yet, but we plan to have a very good assortment of marginal plants, bog plants, floating plants, and water lilies.

Our enthusiasm for ponds and water plants in no way means that our interest in hostas has diminished. Quite to the contrary. We have some great new hostas available this year. In our opinion, 'Blue Angel' is the best big blue hosta on the market. Now there is 'Guardian Angel', a white centered form of 'Blue Angel' that we are very excited about. We think that the white may turn to blue-green later in the summer, but what a sensational plant anyway!

'Sun Power' has been a favorite, medium to large, bright yellow hosta for several years. 'Paradise Power' is a green edged sport of 'Sun Power' that should prove to be as popular as its parent.

No one names hostas better than Tony Avent. We have his 'Sweet Tater Pie' available this year. The chartreuse-gold leaves are thick, waxy, and wavy. The plant sports purple, star shaped flowers. Another Tony Avent plant is 'Squash Casserole', which is touted as being a fast growing gold with rippled edges that handles the sun well.

'Wolverine' is a fine introduction from Jim Wilkins that has blue, pointed leaves with gold margins that turn to white. It has excellent form and color.

'Twilight' is an improved form of *fortunei* 'Aureomarginata'. It is green with gold margins, but has larger, shinier leaves with wider margins and more substance. It is sure to be a fast grower and a popular plant.

We have a total of 67 new hostas on the list this year. Please, feel free to send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope, and we'll be glad to send you an advance copy

of the 1999 list.

Leucanthemum 'Becky' is a shasta daisy (Shastas used to be listed as Chrysanthemums.) that really impressed us when we first saw it in the beautiful garden of Don and Barb Smith of Dunlap, IL. Although it stands 36" tall, it is very sturdy, standing erect even after strong wind or rain. It will bloom from June to October if deadheaded, and makes a good cut flower.

Three new varieties of Pulmonaria should be interesting. 'Majesty' sports all silver leaves with narrow green margins. 'Raspberry Splash' has a strong, upright growing habit with silvered leaves and raspberry flowers. And 'Victorian Brooch' is known for its distinctive, spotted foliage and large, outstanding, magenta-coral flowers on compact scapes.

HORNBAKER GARDENS

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EASIEST DIRECTIONS TO HORNBAKER GARDENS:

From the intersection of I-180 and Rt. 26 (5 miles SE of Princeton), go toward Princeton on Rt. 26 about 1/4 mile and take the first left. Go 2 miles to the top of the steep hill.

